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U.S. Politics & Policy

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Opinions on Gun Policy and the 2016 Campaign

Most Clinton, Trump backers favor stricter background checks

For the past several years, large majorities of both Democrats and Republicans have favored making private gun sales and sales at gun shows subject to background checks.

Today, this proposal draws support from 90% of registered voters who back Hillary Clinton and 75% of voters who back Donald Trump. (http://www.people-press.org/2016/08/26/opinions-on-gun-policy-and-the-2016-campaign/pp_16-08-23_gunslede/)

The latest national survey by Pew Research Center, conducted August 9-16 among 2,010 adults, including 1,567 registered voters, also finds broad support among both candidates' backers for other gun policy proposals, including barring people on federal watch lists from purchasing guns.

Other proposals are much more divisive, however. For instance, about twice as many Clinton supporters as Trump backers favor a ban on assault-style weapons (74% vs. 34%) and the differences are about as large in views of a ban on high-capacity ammunition clips (75% vs. 34%).

Moreover, the gap in how candidates' supporters view overall priorities for the nation's gun policy is much wider today than it has been in any presidential campaign dating to 2000.

As in recent years, the public overall remains divided over whether it is generally more important to protect the right of Americans to own guns (52%) or to control gun ownership (46%). (http://www.people-press.org/2016/08/26/opinions-on-gun-policy-and-the-2016-campaign/augustguns_2/)

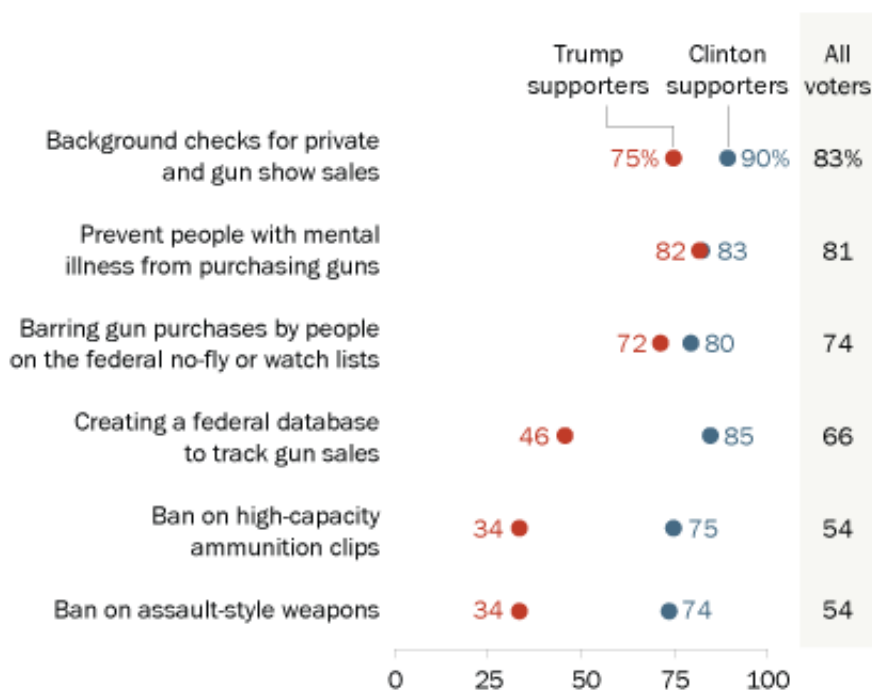
Today, registered voters who prefer the Democratic candidate are more supportive of controlling gun ownership than during the four previous campaigns, while supporters of the Republican candidate are less supportive.

By more than four-to-one (79% to 19%), Clinton supporters prioritize controlling gun ownership over protecting gun rights. By about nine-to-one (90% to 9%), Trump supporters express the opposite view – that it is generally more important to protect gun rights than control gun ownership.

In 2000, there was a 20-percentage-point gap between the shares of Al Gore and George W. Bush supporters who said it was more important to control gun ownership than protect gun rights (66% vs 46%). By 2012, when Barack Obama ran against Mitt Romney, that difference had increased to 41 points (62% vs. 21%) and today it stands at 70 points (79% of Clinton supporters vs. 9% of Trump supporters).

Where Clinton and Trump supporters stand on gun policy proposals

Among registered voters, % of Clinton/Trump supporters who favor ...



Note: Based on registered voters.

Source: Survey conducted August 9-16, 2016.

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To be sure, many Trump supporters favor specific gun policy proposals, while also saying that, in general, it is more important to protect gun rights than control gun ownership. For instance, among the 90% of Trump supporters who prioritize gun rights, 74% also favor expanded background checks. But only about three-in-ten of these Trump supporters who say it is more important to protect gun rights favor bans on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition clips (31% each).

The survey also finds a substantial divide in the views of Clinton and Trump supporters about whether gun ownership does more to protect or endanger public safety. A majority of the public (58%) says that gun ownership does more to protect people from crime than to put people's safety at risk; 37% say gun ownership does more to endanger personal safety.

Fully 89% of registered voters who support Trump say gun ownership does more to protect than to put people's safety at risk, compared with just 9% who believe it does more to risk people's safety. Among Clinton supporters, about twice as many say gun ownership does more to endanger personal safety than say it protects people from becoming victims of crime (65% vs. 32%).

Republicans less supportive of assault weapons ban

(http://www.people-press.org/2016/08/26/opinions-on-gun-policy-and-the-2016-campaign/augustguns_3/)

There is broad public support for background checks for private gun sales and sales at gun shows (81%), laws to prevent the mentally ill from buying guns (76%), barring gun purchases by those on government screening lists (71%), and creating a federal database to track gun sales (68%).

About half support bans on assault-style weapons (52%) and high-capacity ammunition clips (50%).

(http://www.people-press.org/2016/08/26/opinions-on-gun-policy-and-the-2016-campaign/augustguns_4/)

For the most part, opinions on these issues have changed little in recent years, but support for an assault weapons ban has slipped from 57% to 52% since July 2015, with the decline driven by Republicans and Republican-leaning independents.

Currently, 35% of Republicans and Republican leaners favor an assault weapons ban, while 62% are opposed. In July 2015, Republicans were more divided between support (44%) and opposition (51%). Republican opposition to an assault weapons ban is at its highest point since 2013, the first time Pew Research Center asked this question.

Democrats' views are unchanged over the past year: Currently, 67% favor an assault weapons ban, while 32% are opposed.

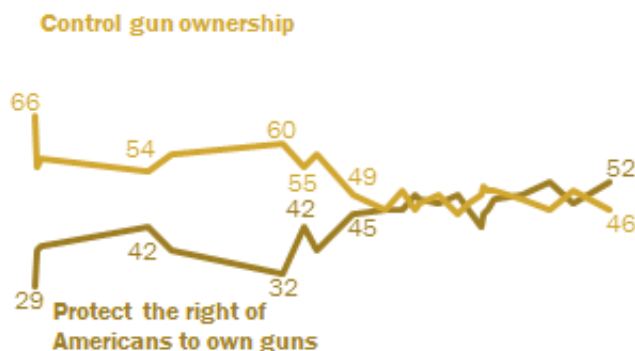
Demographic differences in views of gun policy proposals

(http://www.people-press.org/2016/08/26/opinions-on-gun-policy-and-the-2016-campaign/augustguns_5/)

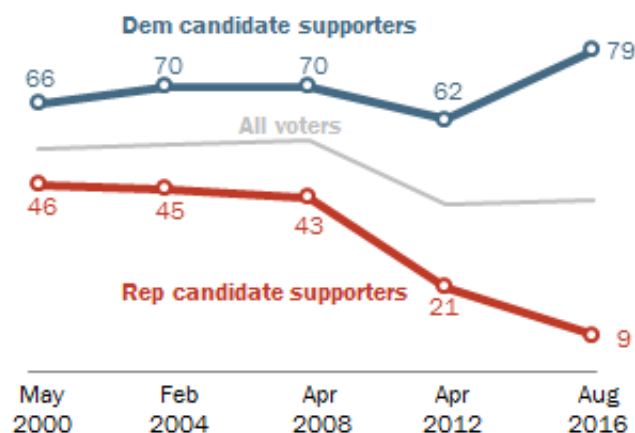
Public support for expanded background checks spans nearly all demographic groups. This also is the case for proposals to prevent the mentally ill – and those on federal no-fly and watch lists – from purchasing guns.

Widening gap among supporters of presidential candidates in gun priorities

% of general public saying it is more important to ...



% of registered voters who say it is more important to control gun ownership than protect gun rights ...



Notes: First graphic is based on general public. Second graphic is based on registered voters. Don't know responses not shown. Source: Survey conducted August 9-16, 2016

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Similarly, there is widespread support for creating a federal database to track gun sales, though more women (74%) than men (61%) favor this. Support also is greater among blacks (81%) and Hispanics (76%) than among whites (64%).

A proposed federal database on gun sales also draws more support from those households in which there are no guns (79%) than among those in gun-owning households (58%). But the differences by gun ownership are modest in views of bans on gun purchases by the mentally ill and those on federal no fly and watch lists. A (http://www.people-press.org/2016/08/26/opinions-on-gun-policy-and-the-2016-campaign/augustguns_6/) nd identical shares of those in gun-owning and non-gun-owning households favor making private gun sales and sales at gun shows subject to background checks (83% each).

The demographic differences – and differences between gun-owning and non-gun-owning households – are much wider when it comes to bans on assault-style weapons and high-capacity ammunition clips.

Women are more likely than men to favor both of these proposals. And while majorities of college graduates favor bans on assault-style weapons (68%) and high-capacity clips (64%), fewer than half of those who have not completed college say the same (46%, 45%).

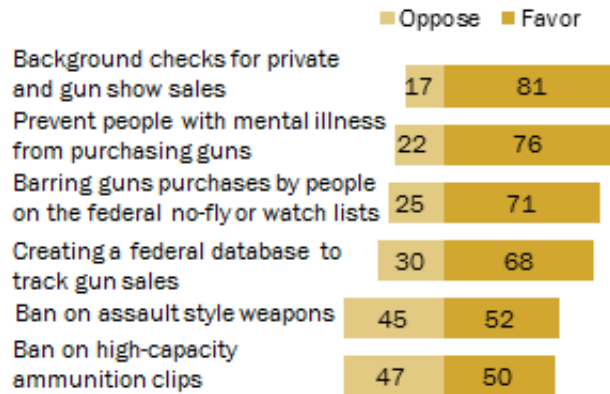
Roughly six-in-ten of those in households without guns support bans on assault-style weapons (61%) and high-capacity clips (57%). Among those in gun-owning households, 45% back each of these proposals.

Does gun ownership do more to protect or put safety at risk?

(http://www.people-press.org/2016/08/26/opinions-on-gun-policy-and-the-2016-campaign/augustguns_7/) A majority of the public (58%) says that gun ownership in this country does more to protect people from becoming victims of crime, compared with 37% who believe it does more to put people's safety at risk. These

Public's views of gun policy proposals

% who favor/oppose each of the following gun measures



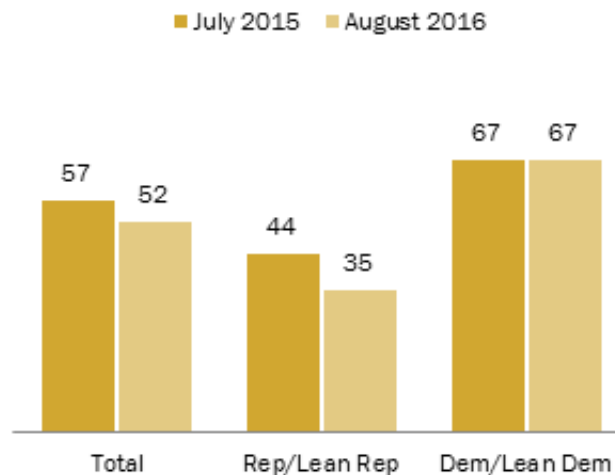
Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted August 9-16, 2016.

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Fewer Republicans favor ban on assault weapons than did so a year ago

% who favor a ban on assault style weapons



Source: Survey conducted August 9-16, 2016.

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views are on par with findings from roughly a year ago when 54% said gun ownership does more to protect people from crime, and four-in-ten (40%) believed it created more of a safety risk.

By nearly two-to-one (64% vs. 33%), whites say that gun ownership does more to protect people than to endanger safety. Blacks are evenly divided (49% say it is more of a safety risk vs. 46% who say it protects people from crime).

Adults with postgraduate degrees are the only educational group in which a majority (59%) says that gun ownership does more to put people's safety at risk than to protect people from crime. Those with college degrees are divided (51% say it protects people from crime, 48% say it is more of a safety risk). By contrast, a solid majority (63%) of those with some college or no college experience see gun ownership more as protection from crime.

Broad support for expanded background checks among those in gun-owning households

% who favor each policy proposal

	Federal database of gun sales	Background checks for gun shows	Barring gun buys by people on no-fly lists	Laws to prevent mentally ill from buying guns
	%	%	%	%
Total	68	81	71	76
Men	61	78	71	79
Women	74	84	70	73
White	64	84	76	83
Black	81	78	64	75
Hispanic	76	72	53	54
18-29	73	81	67	77
30-49	67	83	72	73
50-64	67	81	73	80
65+	65	79	70	77
College grad+	69	88	80	86
Some college	67	84	72	79
HS or less	68	74	63	67
Republican/Lean Rep	50	78	69	79
Democrat/Lean Dem	82	86	74	77
Gun in household (44%)	58	83	73	82
No gun in household (51%)	79	83	70	73

Note: Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted August 9-16, 2016.

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Sizeable gender differences in support of bans on assault weapons, large clips

% who favor each policy proposal

	Ban on assault style weapons %	Ban on high-capacity ammunition clips %
Total	52	50
Men	44	45
Women	60	55
White	55	54
Black	60	58
Hispanic	37	32
18-29	48	42
30-49	51	50
50-64	53	53
65+	59	56
College grad+	68	64
Some college	49	48
HS or less	43	42
Republican/Lean Rep	35	36
Democrat/Lean Dem	67	64
Gun in household (44%)	45	45
No gun in household (51%)	61	57

Note: Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted August 9-16, 2016.

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Whites see gun ownership more as protection, non-whites more safety risk

% who say gun ownership in this country does more to...

	Protect from becoming crime victims %	Put people's safety at risk %	DK
Total	58	37	4=100
Men	64	32	4=100
Women	53	43	4=100
White	64	33	3=100
Black	46	49	5=100
Hispanic	50	46	4=100
Postgrad	37	59	5=100
College grad	51	44	5=100
Some college	66	30	4=100
HS or less	61	35	4=100
Rep/Lean Rep	82	14	4=100
Dem/Lean Dem	39	57	4=100
Gun in household (44%)	74	22	4=100
No gun in household (51%)	43	52	4=100
<i>Among whites</i>			
College grad+	49	48	3=100
Non-college	71	26	3=100

Notes: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics; Hispanics can be of any race. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.
Source: Survey conducted August 9-16, 2016.

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